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My Three Conversations  
with  
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by

Frederic Beecher Perkins

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1877

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1877

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# MY THREE CONVERSATIONS WITH MISS CHESTER.

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## CHAPTER FIRST.

**I** was at a party ; where, is none of your business, and immaterial to the following relation. On second thoughts, however, as localization increases the interest of a narrative, I will say, at New York, in a Fifth Avenue palace.

Perhaps it would be well to say something introductory about myself. I was twenty-five — between you and me, fair reader, I am not so very much older now — tall, well-formed, strong and active, both mentally and physically, and an extensive

and omnivorous reader and student. The only trait of my character which has any special significance, relatively to the matter in hand is, that I have a considerable endowment of that magnetic power used in throwing "sensitives," as they are technically termed, into the mesmeric state, although I very seldom exerted it, and my possession of it was known, I believe, only to myself. Did it never happen to you, respected reader, when looking intently into a person's eyes during conversation, that you *saw* the thought, and even the very words, which passed through his or her mind, in comment or reply? The whole group of phenomena, of which that is one—embracing some classes of dreams, much mental action, animal magnetism, biology, the whole circle, in fact, of physio-psychological science—is, at this present writing, the most profound, comprehensively, multitudinously and variously related, the most promising, important and intensely interest-

ing, and the least understood, of all the departments of human knowledge. I wish I could stop to indicate a few of the complex and astonishingly intimate ramifications by which this philosophy—the philosophy of the combined and reciprocal inter-action of mind and body, the wondrous march or border-territory whereon spirit and matter bear conflicting and contested sway—underlies and entwines itself with human interests and human actions. But that is not my present design ; and for the narrator, especially, must *hoc age* be inscribed upon his pen. Mind *this* ; not that, nor the other.

The relevancy of these remarks consists in this, namely : that the few circumstances which I propose to narrate are an actual exemplification of the working of the laws to whose existence and influence I have alluded. I have permission from the lady ~~most~~ interested to record and publish them ; for, ~~however~~ insignificant in themselves, they will, at least, form some portion of the

archives from which a future generation is certainly to draw facts coöperative in constructing a fabric of universal philosophy, more marvellous in architecture and more immeasurably magnificent in dimensions, than any the wildest dream hitherto figured by the loftiest human intellect. This splendor, however, is of course. Systems of actual truth, the work of the All-powerful—as their awful vastness unveils itself before human eyes—must as much transcend the beauty and the size of the one-sided little elaborations of human minds, as the unimaginable splendors of evening clouds excel the blue and yellow dabs of that landscape-goat of a “paintaster,” Skumble; as the great palaces of the heavens surpass the ecclesiological glories of the Wooden Gothic.

I had selected, according to my custom, a corner, from which I was making my ordinary use of the company, viz.: studying their lives from their faces, and working the detail of expressions and postures into con-

nection with the pre-existent mass of mental philosophy, whose acquisition and arrangement had been my study for years.

All the usual varieties of young men and women passed in review before the uninteresting person in the corner. I was not dressed in fine raiment, wore no gloves, was not known as a "lion," known, indeed at all, to only two or three besides my cousin, the daughter of the house, and only very slightly known even to them and to her. So, nobody stopped to talk with me ; and, as I had arranged with cousin Ellen to let me alone, save when I should ask to be introduced, I had a fair opportunity for my secret espials. It was a curious and entertaining spectacle, when rightly viewed. First, I generalized my eyesight—if the expression be allowable—and gazed upon the moving mass before me, without reference to any particular individual. This, especially during the dances, furnished a droll spectacle. Such another may be observed

by gazing in the same general manner at a church, all waving with fans, like a flock of great butterflies over a bed of gay cabbages, on a hot Sunday in summer : and another, more decided in character, by observing the simultaneous nutations of heads, fingers and arms in an orchestra. These effects are different from that of a band of marching men ; for the entire body of these last moves forward by rhythmic progressions, while in the cases just instanced, the company considered together, is stationary ; and the rhythmic movement of individual limbs and instruments throws only an atmosphere, as it were, of ordered motion over the whole.

I threw out of consideration the bodies of the dancers, and only observed their heads. A strong volition of a few minutes' duration enabled me entirely to lose the remembrance of bodies, and to free myself from the sensations coming from the sound of the music ; and so, from the silent

motions of the dancers, and the accompanying expressions of the faces, in quadrille dances especially, there arose before me a spectacle of such intense absurdity that I was forced to break off my occupation to avoid an obtrusive laugh. I was beholding only faces, it will be remembered, as solely as if I had been looking at heads cut off. The expressions upon nearly all of them were of intense solemnity. Nearly upon a level, they bobbed up and down in couples and fours ; swam about, cocking themselves oddly to one side or to the other ; turned towards each other in the alternations of rest, and gibbered slightly ; anon, launched forth again upon the inane vagaries of their solemn mummary. I nearly laughed aloud, but ceased gazing ; and, forthwith, grew angry. Apish phantasms of silly sport, the winking, wiggling heads were a fair representation of the earnestness with which the "first circles" bury themselves in the mindless frivolities of polite society. I was

angry that the observances of fashion should be so much regarded, even by the brainless nobodies who gabbled and fluttered before me ; and with a most expansive and ardent aspiration after the Apotheosis of Labor, I left the dancers to their aimless evolutions.

Then I made a similar experiment upon the heterogeneous volume of sounds that arose from the social hubbub of the rooms. Not listening to any single voice, I regarded only the clacking, clattering rattle that flowed turbulently up from so many voices, mingled with the monotonous dance-music of the two German fiddlers, the harpist and pianist, who officiated as orchestra. The din was stunning. It was as if the English language had been torn into ragged angular scraps and fragments, and vociferated at the utmost possible speed, and entirely at random, by the whole company. Now and then a shrill laugh, or one or two connected words loudly articulated, jumped up from the rough average of the confused noise.

The harsh fiddle-notes darted and streamed up and down among the tumult, like so many vocal squibs ; and the harp and piano were scarcely audible. A minute or two of such listening satisfied me, and I returned to my invidious business of watching my neighbors.

A flaxen-haired and flaxen-moustached dandy, whose unnaturally slender limbs, cased, *secundum artem*, in skin-tight pants, would almost qualify him for the workhouse under the vagrant laws, as "having no visible means of support," stood "diddling" (*i. e.*, imitating the movements of a wretch in an ague-fit), after the approved fashion, and expending washy conversation and washier smiles upon a female counterpart. Two or three city damsels, very much alike, all having the fair complexions, slender forms and large fringed eyes, so common among metropolitan beauties, were giggling and chattering, in the enjoyment of that fluent ladies' talk so incomprehensible and

unattainable to us stupid and slow-tongued men. Two or three wizzled antiques of the same sex mumbled sourly together upon a sofa. Several fat mothers conversed in awful conclave, on the other side of the room ; and in the middle, the varying dances wove their interminable tangle.

With her back towards me, so near that I could almost hear her words, stood a tall young woman dressed in black, with magnificent shoulders and arms, with raven-black hair of great fineness, length and volume, and a dark but peculiarly transparent complexion. She was surrounded by several gentlemen, whom she seemed at no loss to entertain, at least so far as to bear her full share in the conversation, and in the commerce of wits, whatever they might be ; for there seemed to be in the circle much laughter, though not of the pleasantest sort. As I watched the group, I saw one and another of the gentlemen's faces redden, when the others laughed ;

one or two grew preternaturally sober, and quietly left that part of the room. The lady's noble head, haughtily set upon her neck, moved now and then with an almost imperceptible gesture of disdain or anger. I quietly drew a little nearer ; not to listen to the conversation, but to observe the heads. The faces of the men were all foolish and conceited ; and they were, as it happened, all fair-haired. Although I could not see the lady's face, yet the dark masses of her hair and dress, and the height and volume of her head, her self-possessed attitude, the minute gesture of which I spoke, and the short and keen replies which she shot about, rendered the contrast of characters, as she stood among the young men, extreme and striking.

She stood talking with her retinue for a considerable time ; and afterward with others who approached. I observed her steadily and intently, watching her head, her temperament, her form, and her de-

meanor. All were faultless ; at least, even with a sufficiently critical disposition, and much experience in estimating phrenological, physiological, and psychological characteristics, I could not see anything to change. I did not, however, as I said, see the front of her head. I gazed and gazed, until I became absorbed in my contemplations, and in considering their consequent and collateral reflections, my meditations eventuated in a profound reverie, of a dim and undefinable character. All my thoughts, at first, seemed centred upon the individual lady at whom I had been looking. But I lost track of them ; and it seemed, afterward, as if I had entered into a state resembling that which Asiatic ascetics believe they can attain by unending reiterations of their sacred name.

I was aroused from entire forgetfulness of time and place, by some sudden and uncomfortable sensation, which made me for an instant suspect that I had been struck,

although I could not say where. Upon this unceremonious recall of my fugitive wits, whatever its nature might be, I looked again at the fair object of my speculations ; and with such a feeling as if I had not seen her for a long time. For the sudden change from abstracted reverie of intense contemplation, to mere ordinary intuition, was quite great enough to cause the requisite break in the current of my consciousness. The strange beauty, for some reason or other, was blushing deeply—at least it is improbable that so brilliant a color would incarnadine her neck, and not her cheeks and brow. Deeply she blushed for some unknown reason, and almost immediately she moved away, without turning her head, saying something which I could not hear, to a distant part of the room.

I recurred to my cogitations upon the fitting figures before me, but still my thoughts recurred to the “dark ladye.” I felt certain that she must be well worth

acquaintance. It could hardly be possible that one evidently of so remarkable natural endowments, should not present a rare study for the philosopher—especially for the philosopher in living minds. I desired to complete my new discovery. My snug corner became dull. I left it; and edged and twisted about the lofty rooms, pretending great need to arrive at some point in advance, which, like the beetle with buttered horns, I carried forward as I went. Up and down I wormed about; sometimes looking earnestly at the other side of the room in general; sometimes peering with emphasis at a feigned something among the closely crowded male and female shoulders around me; until, after making a good deal of trouble, and many skilful evolutions, I unsuspectedly established myself to my satisfaction, *en échelon* and to the front of my unknown. Thus, I was in better luck than before, in my philosophical pursuit. For while I was as well hidden from her a

before, by the densely aggregated and moving mass of the crowd, a skilful adjustment of my operations would preserve me from annoying her, while I could study her face and gesture-language to much better advantage.

Of her face, the lower half was perfect but not peculiar, unless for the firm closure of the full lips. The eyes were large, black, and deep-set. The eyebrows fell with an unusual slope at the outer end of the eye. The forehead rose high above, full and steep, like an intellectual man's forehead ; and in those portions which would be its four angles, were it a parallelogram laid athwart the face, fuller than any I had ever observed. And in looking, again I glided into deep and concentrated musings ; and again, from a state of profound reverie, I was aroused by such another shock as I had felt before. Again I gathered together my scattered thoughts ; and as soon as I had retraced their lost clue up to the passing

moment, again I looked toward the dark beauty who had so much attracted me. She had changed her position, and was looking another way ; but again, whether from some casualty of conversation, or from having noticed my persistent gaze, she was blushing.

Beginning, now, to be actuated by a desire to obtain by conversation the complement of the scanty knowledge with which mere exterior observation had supplied me, and thus to secure some satisfactory acquaintance with one who, I did not doubt, possessed unusual gifts, I forthwith resorted to Cousin Ellen. From her I requested an introduction to my fair unknown ; at the same time inquiring in general as to her name and condition. She was, Ellen said, a Miss Irene Chester ; the daughter of a farmer in one of the small sea-port towns of Fairfield County, Connecticut ; an assistant teacher in one of the city schools ; an old schoolmate of her's, Cousin Ellen's ;

here in society for almost the first time, but already making quite a sensation ; nick-named “ ‘The Two-edged Sword,’ ” from the keenness of her repartees ; always a strange girl ; invited on the ground of the school-fellowship, having, I think, been Ellen’s room-mate ; perhaps not known at all in city society, beyond Ellen’s immediate circle ; of great conversational talent, a student, a reader, and otherwise accomplished.

These last, namely, the study, reading and accomplishments, a trifle unsettled me ; for ladies with those recommendations usually gabble and dabble, but little else. Yet I took comfort from the omen of power in the nick-name, and persisted.

Miss Chester heard my name and the recital of my cousinship to the pretty hostess, with considerable frigidity ; looked me clearly in the eye as I accosted her, and waited, apparently under the influence of some dislike or disinclination to speak, for me to begin.

These cool receptions are very much more adapted to vivify one's anger than one's intellect. I burned in inward wrath and outward speechlessness, for a minute or so ; then suddenly adopting a resolution, I drove away the rage, assumed as pretty a simper as I could muster, and ventured to remark, with an air of great interest and (I flatter myself) a well-executed "diddle,"

"It's very fine weather, Miss Chester."

"Yes, sir."

"Unusually crowded rooms this evening. How tiresome it is to be squeezed up among so many disagreeable vulgar people !"

"Do you think so ?" said she, with a sort of glimmer in her eye. "If it is so disagreeable, what made you come ?"

"Self-denial," I answered, "is healthful for the soul. And aside from that excellent reason"—here I rather exaggerated my simper and my diddle, to the young lady's evident disgust—"I must have had a presentiment of pleasure reserved for me, in

the acquisition of so delightful an acquaintance as Miss Chester." I accompanied the last words with a culminating grin, and as silly a bow as I could contrive.

"*Are* you acquainted with me?" she asked, with a curious observing expression of eye and of lip, as much as to say, "behold here a new and strange variety of baboon."

I sniggered after the most approved style, and answered with the fashionable euphuistic dialect, at which I could easily see that Miss Chester's disdain and anger were flaming almost unendurably,

"He, he, he! Ah flattah meself that I am competent to elucidate and analyze charactahs at short notice. But you must be weary with standing so long. Pahmit me to wait upon you to the *tête-à-tête* opposite; and if you will allow me, ah shall be exceedingly delighted to fahnish you a specimen of my powahs in that line."

"By all means, sir," said Miss Chester.

“I thank you.”

So we sat down.

“I must make one preface,” said I. “I presume that a young lady of Miss Chester’s talents and information ” (another disdain-provoking bow from me), “is aware that such observation as I have been able to make, cannot reveal what modifications circumstances and occupation may have engrafted upon your original character. Permit me, therefore, to ask that you will just tell me what and where your life has been.”

“Not one single syllable,” returned she, with evident pleasure in a short refusal. “You pretended to an acquaintance with me, and offered to prove it. And now, when it comes to the trial, you already begin to feel about for such scraps and hints as you may hope to coax out of me, after the usual fashion of fortune-tellers. I thought it would be so. I don’t believe you know yourself, and to pretend to know

me, whom you never saw before, and probably never will again ! How should you ? And why should you ? ”

“ I know this, at least,” said I, quietly, and dropping my baboonery, “ that you are quite angry, and that you have acquired a sudden and immeasurable contempt for me. Is it not so ? ”

“ Yes,” said she, promptly, and with inconsiderate but full sincerity ; for she spoke in answer to all my conversation and manners, up to my last question. Then she started, and looking at me in hasty alarm, and reflecting what her answer had been, added, “ No ; ” for she comprehended for the first time the indications afforded by the new tone of the query.

“ Hot and cold,” I replied. “ However, both answers are right. No matter for the apparent inconsistency. Deeper thinkers than either of us have decided that truth may oftentimes best be presented by the assertion of incompatible extremes.”

“I think you are correct,” said Miss Chester, “but I don’t know how you could tell. However, as to that notion about presenting truth, it behooves to be careful lest the poor creature perish between its two incompatible bundles of hay. Well, sir ; now, if you will please commence the proof positive of acquaintance ?”

“Yes.” I scanned her face a moment, and added, “You do not like to attend church.”

“I do, too,” she replied, hastily. “You are wrong there.”

“You are glad to think so,” I said. “But think a moment. I do not mean that you dislike religious services. But does not very much of the church choir music displease you ?”

“Yes.”

“And the prayers—were you never perplexed with a troublesome feeling that somehow they were not *your* prayers ?

“And the sermon—I am sure you have

often shocked your friends by staying at home and reading one, when they were sure you ought to have been at church."

"Pshaw!" said Miss Chester, "you found that out from cousin Ellen."

"Not at all. I stated the particular fact merely as one phase of a characteristic which ramifies into many manifestations. You are what is sometimes called 'original'—I mean slow of belief, and independent in reasoning. You examine doctrine and precept for yourself. The rapid statements of a sermon—of any oral discussion of a subject—do not satisfy you. You want to examine, to compare, to weigh. That accounts for your preferring to read sermons rather than to hear them. In general, you dislike lectures and public addresses, on whatever subjects; and in general, you prefer to read on them rather than to hear. As to the prayers, you are wrong to allow yourself in the feeling, though I am right in stating it to you. The dissatisfaction is

owing to your defect of sympathy, either with congregation or preacher. If you would abandon yourself to a generous participation in petitions which are only such as universal petitions must of necessity be, you would reap good from the prayer. The music, not to speak of its usual wretched execution, is unpleasant to you, as a dishonest pretence of praise, offered usually by the irreligious and profane lips of persons who chant hymns to God, not because hymns overflow from hearts full of love, but because in their individual cases, the laryngeal membranes and tissues possess unusual motive and vibratory power. You see that my observations are merely individual corollaries from the premises of honesty, good observing and reflecting faculties, and musical temperament."

"It appears, then," said Miss Chester, "that your acquaintance is one not of very long standing, and hypothetical and extemporaneous to an extreme."

“ But have I not spoken truly ? ”

“ Yes, I believe so,” said she, “ although the things you say are such, as for some reason or other, had not been articulately presented to me exactly in that way. I hardly knew them, if at all. And what is more,” she added, with a troubled look, “ I do not like to be so easily read. I had thought myself safe in unintelligibility.”

“ While,” I rejoined, “ you fancied that nobody else had got beyond ‘ baker ’ and ‘ shady. ’ ”

“ Excuse the long word. I will plead the privilege of my pedagogy for that, though. But as to your discoveries ; I see that things which I certainly never told to anybody, are known outside of my own mind. The more I think of it, the less I like it.”

“ But you should not dislike truth,” I said.

“ The truth is not to be spoken at all times. Nor is it always best or necessary

to have it known even."

"Perhaps not," I answered. "But I will proceed with my analysis."

"No," said Miss Chester, hastily. "You have said quite enough already. I—— You"——

"One single remark let me make, however," I answered, and I now looked steadily into eyes that did not endure my gaze. "Just one thing. You do not despise me any longer. And you are half afraid of me, and the rest, I fear, is dislike."

"I won't tell you anything about it," she replied, with an alarmed sharpness.

"Very well; quite as well;" I rejoined. "A good observer is like a good arithmetician. He proves his work as he goes along; he does not need to look for 'the answer in the book.' But let me ask you if you play chess?"

"I do. Not much; but I am very fond of it."

"Will you give me leave to come and

play a game with you ? ” I asked.

I had permission ; and thus our conversation ended for the evening.

It is no part of the design of this plain statement of facts, to produce any dramatic surprises. So I will plainly say, that by this time I was exceedingly delighted with my new acquaintance, and, indeed, to all intents and purposes, thoroughly and suddenly “in love at first sight.”

But as to the nature of her opinions, in regard to me, except for the brief synopsis which I had mentioned to herself, and which, also I was confident of, in respect to my estimate of their kind, but not of their degree, I could form no guess. But respect is much.

## CHAPTER SECOND.

MISS CHESTER, in truth, was almost my ideal, in point of personal attractions ; namely, the embodiment of health and strength, under the lovely feminine limitations imposed by the laws and graceful lines of womanly beauty ; and I felt a certainty which long observation and study in psychology and physiology might justify, that her mind was worthy even of a nobler casket, if such a one were imaginable. The fine hair, so inscrutably dark ; the deep liquid eyes, whose unfathomable irises seemed, as I gazed into them, overflowing as redundant fountains into the clear white eyeballs ; the dark and clear transparency of skin, demonstrated (a rare conjunction) quickness and endurance, not bodily only,

but intellectual. The great volume of the head, the noble lofty forehead, the height of the upper cerebral region, proved as surely her intellectual excellence which, in such a character as hers, must have been sustained and developed by the severe discipline of her work as a teacher. For, although the fact is seldom recognized, and indeed little known, no occupation on earth furnishes so comprehensive, invigorating, and symmetrical an exercise for the maturing, or matured mind, as the quiet and neglected business of "teaching school." And although disagreeable conclusions might seem suggested by the sharp words which I was certain she had distributed plentifully to the amiable youths, my predecessors in conversation, of which she had given me a specimen or two, and of which, the surname she had acquired might be reckoned a boding omen, yet they pleased me. For the wretched dandies richly deserved them. And how natural was it, for

a strong and clear mind like hers, full of noble thoughts and the power to live them out, to be kindled into sparkling and blazing anger at the witless drivel of the butterflies she crushed ! Moreover ; I remembered with keen delight, how the wrathful contempt which my simulated folly had provoked, faded out forthwith, as soon as I spoke true and clear thoughts to her ; how her maiden pride, so pardonably and beautifully lofty and outspoken, when she felt that her interlocutors dwelt in a sphere far below her—when she flashed lightnings of scorn down upon their puny heads from the ethereal air of her own inaccessible and uninvaded realm of thought—had fled, abashed ; how with truthful and maidenly honesty infinitely more lovely than her beautiful anger, and which was the basis, to me reflecting upon it, of deep delicious musings, she had recognized in me an intelligence honest and like her own, in kind at least, even if (which I never doubted) her

womanhood had clothed her with the great womanly prerogatives of deeper intuitions and more unfathomable enthusiasms. And that she was a true woman still, and not a mannish unsexed truant from her right life-limits, I knew ; first, because I had seen so plainly—and I revelled in the remembrance, not from selfish pride of power, but because the fact vindicated to myself a claim of near relationship to such a noble soul—because I had seen so plainly how she consented to respect my masculine prerogative of self-confident and aggressive intellection ; and, second, because it was only with such instinctive frankness, and with such sweet and close following recoil into reluctance, that she recognized my bold appeals to her own interior consciousness—my sudden invasion of her own realms of silent thought—where she had before sat, sole empress,

“In maiden meditation, fancy free.”

Such thoughts burdened me in daily dreams ; and the current of my studious

life, before flowing steadily on in reading and thought, now spread itself out in wide, quiet expanses of reverie; reflecting infinities of sweet thoughts, but flowing onward no more. I was "deeper than ever plummet sounded," in (I flattered myself), a reasonable, noble, and beautiful love.

After two or three fruitless calls, made, to my great disgust, when Miss Chester happened to be out of town, or otherwise employed away from home, I succeeded in finding her at leisure for the chess game which she had promised me.

I was shown, that evening, into a well furnished parlor; and in a few minutes Miss Chester entered, dressed, as usual, in black. She greeted me as if I had been an old acquaintance.

"Yes," said I, "that is right. We *are* acquainted, are we not? In fact, old friends?"

"In some sense," she replied, "it certainly does seem as if I had known you a

long time ; or rather, as if you had known me a long time, for I don't feel as well acquainted with you as you do with me. You read thoughts with an ease which frightens me."

"Where the fountain is so clear," I said, "it is no wonder that its depths are searched. Turbid and muddy thoughts would have shamed your mind into a cloudy secretive fear. But *that* would have revealed its own story, too."

"I believe," said Miss Chester, "that I won't talk any more mental philosophy with you. But here is our battlefield. I suppose I might as well surrender without a summons, if it were not for the shame. So I challenge you to the course with sharpened spears, as Ivanhoe did his wicked enemy, Brian de Bois Guilbert."

"I accept the challenge, but not in the spirit of De Bois Guilbert. And in token that I bear you no ill-will, I offer you the right hand of a foeman's friendship."

She hesitated almost imperceptibly, but took the offered hand with a smile. I had offered her mine, indeed, that I might touch her's again, and I think some conscious or unconscious perception of it withheld her's.

"Now, then," said I, as I held her hand a moment, let it go, sat down by the table, emptied the chessmen upon the board, and quoted with assumed ferocity, "'Death to the Huguenot! Fagot and Flame!'"

Miss Chester replied promptly,

"'But the braggart retreated more sad than he came.' There's a Roland for your Oliver, sir. Still, your random shot told, for my mother was of a Huguenot family from the south of France, which came over to this country about 1690, and settled near New York, when John Jay's ancestors and so many more good men and women fled out of France to escape the *dragonnades*."

"Indeed? But now please tell me where you found the quotation with which you

answered mine ? ”

“ If I can remember, certainly. And where did you get yours ? ”

I reflected a moment. “ It is mere ‘ flotsam,’ I suspect—a splinter from some half-read poem, floating among miscellaneous *débris* of hurried reading. I declare I can’t locate it. Stay, I’ll tell you. No.” And I had to give it up.

“ I’m not so honest as you,” said Miss Chester. “ I have tinkered my line—it is a sort of transfer from Walter Scott’s ‘ Search after Happiness.’ The last two lines, you know, are

‘ And the king, disappointed, in sorrow and shame  
Went back to Serendib as sad as he came.’

I think I caught it by the jingle at the end, as one might a rattlesnake by the tell-tale. Excuse the pun, please. The requisite alteration I extemporized.”

By this time the battle was ranged. Miss Chester, by lady’s privilege, having the white pieces, and I the bloody red.

I invited her to the attack with as much politeness as did the Colonel of the English household troops his French adversaries at Fontenoy, and with more literature ; for I challenged again in verse—

“ Charge, Chester, charge ! ”

“ For shame ! ” exclaimed my fair foe, laughing however, “ to pervert and parody right and left in that way ! I fear you don’t reverence anything, sacred or profane. I won’t begin, now, unless the lot shall decide it so.”

By lot the first move fell to me.

“ I don’t know,” said I, scanning Miss Chester’s face, “ whether to attack you in an ordinary or an extraordinary manner. Let me consider. You like ghost stories. I shouldn’t wonder if you specially enjoyed Poe’s marvellous imagination, “ The Fall of the House of Usher.”

She laughed. “ You are right, I declare. Do you ? ”

“ I do, indeed, So, seeing that you take

such delight in things ‘strange and vague,’ I will treat you to a chess opening of that precise description.”

And I moved, king’s knight’s pawn one.

In giving a cursory account of the progress of the game, I cannot of course expect to make myself understood in detail by untechnical readers. But the game of chess is one whose combinations and varying fortunes can perhaps be more readily represented by illustrative phrases drawn from the language pertaining to departments of life and action not merely lusory, than any other transaction so insignificant as a sedentary amusement. I shall therefore pause a little for an explanatory *excursus*.

The main series of evolutions of a game of chess may very aptly be narrated in phrases applicable to a military campaign. There is the same set of material conditions ; namely : an area for combat, invasive and defensive ; a given force to command ; main points of attack and defence ; centres

of operations ; and necessity for intricately adjusted combinations of effort, for in both cases each separate corps or soldier must subserve some leading purposes, immediate or remote, or both, and must also strengthen his neighbors without impeding them. The strife is decided by the same conditions in the opponents, viz., equality or inequality of force, or of skill, or of both. And the same qualities of mind are required : clearness of perception, longanimity, boldness, decision and perseverance.

Having premised thus much, I may more intelligibly proceed to state that the move with which I commenced my game was the first step of a plan of campaign like that of Fabius the Delayer ; a movement designedly insignificant, upon my own flank, designed to induce the enemy to deploy rapidly and unwisely, and so lay her positions open to some deadly attack when the game should be in mid-career. I intended to hold my centre troops close around my

king, and to carry on my attack and defence from the sides of the game, allowing my opponent what is usually supposed the decisive advantage of occupying all the central open field, as the sly old Roman I mentioned, who "lurked and wandered in the bailiwicks" of Apulia and of Latium, lying close among the hills, watching Hannibal, and waiting for chances to annoy him.

The game progressed as I expected ; and in truth, much more so, too. For Miss Chester's forces had been manœuvred more skilfully than I had presumed upon ; indeed she was the only lady player I ever saw who marshalled the mimic ranks with a man-like and purposeful decision and force of combinations. My plan, like an illogical argument, seemed likely to develop itself only to its own confusion. My deceitful Fabian policy, allowing my opponent time and space to construct an impregnable array, had cramped up my own hosts within a space so limited as to prevent me from

developing their power any-whither. It seemed likely that (in a "chess point of view") I should be slain helpless and motionless, like a rat in a hole.

But it was not merely the difficulty of my chosen course of play, either, that prevented the operation of my combinations. I had been struggling hard to confine my attention wholly to my game; for, as a good player and a genuine lover of chess, I abhorred to be beaten. My sexual pride, moreover, revolted, in spite of philosophy, against being beaten by a woman, and I experienced much repugnance, also, at the prospect of sharing the undesirable sensations of that disingenuous machinator commemorated by Shakespeare as affording special delight to beholders—

——“The knavish engineer  
Hoist by his own petard.”

Therefore I strove to centre my mental powers upon the analytical and mnemonic operations mainly valuable in chess. But,

for the first time, I could not do it. At one move after another, I caught myself gazing at Miss Chester, instead of at the pieces, and my thoughts intensely occupied in retracing the occurrences of the evening when I first met her. The violent efforts I made to discontinue this irrelevant occupation, must themselves of course have used much of the power which I could otherwise have bestowed on my game; and their ill-success, again, left more and more of their power to expend itself upon unreasonable and absurd reverie. But so it was, and I could not prevent it. The time which I should have occupied—which Miss Chester *did* occupy—in planning and combining, I used in gazing at her, as she leaned in steady study over the table; in gazing, not merely with the close attention to curves and forms which, nevertheless, artistic knowledge and experience did cause me to use; but with that mere rapture of contemplation with which we look at what

is grand and perfectly magnificent, even to the satisfaction of our ideal of perfection. She nearly surprised me at it, once or twice. I escaped by quickly dropping my eyes, not altogether ingenuously, I fear, upon the board. Nor, had she been disposed to critical observation, could the fact have escaped her that something prepossessed me. For not only did such evasions cause my cheeks to tingle, but they were followed by particularly asinine proceedings in my conduct of the game. For, having wasted the minutes which should have found me a strong move, in dreams, I then, ashamed of further delay, moved not only unpreparedly, but with the additional blindness of embarrassment and anger.

We had played without remark, Miss Chester studiously and I morosely or abstractedly, for nearly an hour. It was only the slow development consequent upon the line of play which I had adopted, which kept me from being checkmated before.

But at last I thought that I discovered the inevitable impendency of check-mate in five moves. I waited to study the position fairly, and instead of that, fell off into unseasonable and profound meditation. I can hardly assert that I was precisely in the voluntary exercise of my ordinary mental faculties, such was the extreme of my abstraction. At least I quite forgot, for the time being, my place and my occupation. In dreams of delightful memory, and delightful, though groundless vaticination. But these were suddenly shattered into destruction by a spasm or blow which vibrated in some mysterious way through all the chambers of my being. I looked up, and was astounded. Miss Chester stood erect before me, her large eyes dilated, and her breast heaving with anger and fear; and the red blood crimsoning her fair face, her fair neck, into a deep blush.

“How dare you.” said she, rapidly and angrily, “use such a power over me? This

is the third time that——. But you may understand that even if you have it, you can never subject me to it. Did you not understand that the will of your subject must be subdued, or surrendered? If I were not able and willing to defy all you can do, I promise you I would have left you without a word. So often—in my own home, too!”

In utter extremity of surprise, I too arose. She had spoken as if profoundly convinced of some pernicious attempt designedly made by me; but what her precise belief could be, I wondered, and had to answer nearly at random.

“Would you believe me,” I asked, “under *any* sanction?”

She replied, hesitatingly, “I don’t know”——

“I swear to you,” I said, “before God, that I never entertained the most distant wish or purpose in respect to you, which could displease, or should displease the proudest or noblest woman.”

She stood yet hesitant in angry beauty. Even where truth is intellectually believed, it is often not felt until some corroboratory circumstance be furnished.

“You *know* it is so,” I added, earnestly, “I know you saw how unexpected your words were to me.”

“I did ;” she answered. “I saw it. I believe you. But it was natural, you know, to be indignant.”

“But I *don't* know, either,” I replied. “There is something here which I don't half understand. And you must let me talk with you about it. Let me lead you to the sofa.”

She sat down, and I sat, unrebuked, near her. “What do you mean,” I continued, “by speaking of ‘the third time?’”

“You know,” she answered, half suspiciously, as if thinking that I pretended ignorance.

“I think I partly do ; but I want to be certain.”

“Don’t you recollect,” said Miss Chester, “that you treated me in the same way, twice, the other evening? And before you had spoken to me, too?”

“I remember well,” said I, “being twice surprised myself, by some one striking me a severe blow, as I supposed. And I acknowledge that I looked much and often at you. But, to-night, it must have been your anger, I think, that struck me. At least, I saw that you were angry. I say struck. But it was not a blow. It was something like a spasm; or, indeed, not that either; a sudden and powerful repellant force exerted upon me, and operating, it seems to me, now that I consider it, neither on my body nor my mind. But I don’t understand it at all; although I confess to you——. But tell me, please, what was the sensation that you experienced? For it seems to me that you have been agitated much more than I.”

“You magnetized me,” said she; “or

tried to. Don't you know what that is?"

"Yes. I know what that is, perfectly well. I know that I have some power of that kind. But I have never met with any phenomenon like these which seem to have occurred, in respect to you, and certainly *have* appeared in respect to myself. Please tell me plainly all about it. For there are, I think, many things which I can learn from you; and I shall be right glad to learn."

I spoke with two meanings; if, indeed, I needed any instruction in the love-lesson which I was intuitively learning from my beautiful companion. Whether she saw both of them, I do not know. But she blushed as she answered,

"I will tell you just what happened to me. You know what the sensation is which indicates the coming of psycho-magnetic power from some person other than one's self?"

"No, indeed," I replied; "that is, unless these three curious, sudden rebuffs, if I

might call them so, which I have felt lately, were such. In truth, I have, perhaps, an unreasonably keen horror of coming under any such influence. I have often thought, that if I should find any person 'magnetizing' me, I would kill him, as surely as if it were necessary to prevent him from cutting my throat."

"Yes. Then you can understand," said she; "how justifiably I was displeased when I found you trying to magnetize me."

"Don't you believe me yet?" I asked. "I do most solemnly assure you that I had not the remotest intention of the kind. If I did it, it was entirely and most innocently involuntary."

"Do you mean to say," returned Miss Chester, now apparently much surprised, but incredulously, "that you did not undertake to put my volition into a state of subjection to your own, either this evening or the other?"

"Most assuredly I do," I answered.

“Did I not tell you so before? I never used any such power at all, except to relieve one feeble person from a headache.”

So speaking, I grew angry. For now, for the first time, I understood what was the suspicion that Miss Chester entertained of me, viz.: that I had endeavored to make myself master of her will, by taking advantage of her susceptible nervous temperament. So I, myself, now spoke further; and disdainfully and wrathfully:

“And since you yet think that I proposed so vile and devilishly wicked a snare as to rob a woman of the control of her own spirit, I do well to be angry. I will not even deny so base an accusation. Believe it, if you can. And good-by to you. For I denied it, and truly, before. Neither shall anyone have the opportunity of disbelieving me twice, if I can prevent it.”

So I was departing in haste, and in bitter anger and disappointment—anger at being so unworthily suspected—disappointment

at the death of wild, baseless hopes, unjustified, and, truly, almost unborn.

But she saw then—her feminine instinct admonished her—that I spoke in most entire truthfulness. And she recalled me; saying, “Don’t go. I believe you, now, most fully. I did not understand you before, or I should have believed you before.”

And when, in my overpowering and deaf wrath, I strode unlistening into the hall, and was departing in speed, like a true and kind friend, she stopped me. For she stepped promptly between me and the door; and as I lifted my angry eyes upon her, hardly seeing anything, indeed, through the turbid tumults of unendurable passion that raged within me, she laid her fair hand upon my arm, and detained me with gentle force. And she lifted her clear eyes to mine, and looked upon me with such grieved and deep surprise, that I was abashed and ashamed to appear before one so pure in such unlovely fury.

“You must not go away so angry. Come back. I will tell you a good reason for my suspicion. You positively shall not go away so unjustly angry at me.”

“Miss Chester,” I replied, in shame as sudden as my wrath had been, “I will stop, if you will promise to forgive my foolish passion.”

“Yes; certainly.” Then, seeing that I was disposed to reduplicate apologies, she continued: “Don’t say a word about it. We don’t, either of us, I believe, quite understand the other, yet. But when I have told you what I wish, you may depart, if you will, either to return or not. I do not expect to retain friends long.”

She spoke sadly. Nor was her sadness needed to induce me to remain, for my displeasure was born of sorrow. So we sat down again.

“The reason of which I spoke,” she said, “is simply this. I have before this time, narrowly escaped from one who

sought to exercise over me the power which I supposed you were seeking to use. I am sure I need not justify myself any further?"

"No, indeed," I answered. "But why did you speak of not retaining friends for any long time?"

"Because I never sought to. I cannot expect fuller measures of liking than such as I have meted out to others."

I could not deny the justice of the retribution. I made no answer, and there was a short pause. Then, recollecting a former part of our conversation, I asked again for an account of her own sensations at the time when she had supposed me attempting to bring her under a magnetic subjection to my will.

"I doubt very much," said she, "whether the words exist for describing it. For several years I have read and talked much on this new philosophy of the mind and soul; but all the terms are vague, transferred from former uses into the present one;

unsuitable, they fit like an empty crabshell to an oyster. So I can hardly tell you what it is. It begins, however, with a sensation which I can hardly describe, as I said, as to its precise nature—a general consciousness of relations or sympathies offered or obtruded from outside of one's own being; and this consciousness of mere relation proceeds and intensifies and individualizes, until the threads or web of the medium of connection weave thicker and thicker, and gather up into a cord passing directly to the person acting; and then that person becomes recognized as so acting. I don't mean that there is any actual cord, or material, or traceable road or way opened between the parties. I use the expression as the best practicable mode of representing the train of sensations. One thing more will finish all I can tell. You remember that story of Heinrich Zschokke, in which the somnambule lady recognizes so disgustfully the gross animalized character of the

Italian prince, her wooer ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ The story is truthful there. There has always been, when I have felt the sensations I describe, an almost immediate revelation of that kind. It has seemed to me, though I must use words in the same vague representative sense again, that those who approached me in that way were unhumanized into beasts. Their personality seemed to change and degrade. Their souls departed. The force of their life was a mere animal efflux, first imperceptibly alloying the stream of influence which they rayed forth, but rapidly predominating until I was inexpressibly shocked by the consciousness of the innate brutality of such minds. I don't think I can state the experiences more intelligibly, though I have spent much time in meditating on them. I almost doubt whether, in the present state of scientific nomenclature and research, the conditions for the classification of this department of knowledge exist.”

Miss Chester ceased. "Allow me," said I, after a little thought, "to ask you a supplementary question or two. Was it not the bestial grossness of the powers, which you felt, which aroused in you the resisting horror of spasmodic volition, which freed you at once from the vile influence?"

"Yes," she replied; "I feel sure that it was." Then I asked, once more, with many doubts, and a most painful sinking of the heart, like that which assails a rash leaper, who doubts for an instant, in mid-air, whether he shall reach the other side of the chasm—for I staked an unmeasurable hope or sorrow upon the chance of the single question—almost desperately I asked, although I was certain that I had looked and longed in pure freedom from any low desire—"Are you sure that it was that same disagreeable surprise and disgust which caused you to recalcitrate so violently against the influences which seem to have gone from me to you?"

“I cannot be quite sure,” returned Miss Chester. “I repel every approach of the kind as soon as I can distinguish the individual making it. And I now undergo so painful an agitation when I become aware that I am within such a sphere—such a keen apprehension of dangerous neighborhood, and so quick an anger—that I no longer stop to analyze the elements of whose operation I am conscious. But,” she added, looking to the further side of the room, “I do most fully believe that the thing happened without ill intention on your part. Is not that enough?”

“Perhaps so, if it is all you can say.”

Then a thought occurred to me, that I would contrive to have this test applied; for I cared for no risk. I would know, if I were unconsciously impure, that it was so; and purify myself. I did not for a moment doubt the reliability of this strange insight. And I continued—

“But I want leave to visit you again, and

to read you one passage from a favorite author of mine, which I am sure you will like. And, in return, I shall ask you for some music."

"But I have not told you that I could play. You have found it out by some queer method, I am sure. What was it?"

"I observed, as you drummed upon the table, that you played triplets and thirds with your left hand; and only a pianist or organist would do that."

"It is right," said she. "I will furnish such music as I can."

I was so bold as to ask her to set a time for my next visit, which she did; and I was about departing, when she reminded me that our game of chess was yet unfinished. I hastily assured her that my interest in that game had altogether disappeared, when I had discovered the five-move mate; that I "resigned the game," and challenged her to another, at the first convenient opportunity. And so I departed.

## CHAPTER THIRD.

Now ought I to apologize for the unreflecting and imprudent manner in which I had so suddenly become enamored ? With one whom I had seen twice only ; of whose character, abilities, cultivation, I had but the most transient opportunities of judging ? Perhaps so. The thoughts, however, which passed through my mind while I sat in my quiet little room, and meditated upon Miss Chester, my acquaintance with her, and its future, if any apology be needed or admissible, must supply it. I reflected, therefore, somewhat as follows :—

Gloriously beautiful : *That* I can see — I, who am wont to be fastidious, even to the implication of affectation. Physically strong and healthy : The easy grace of

motion, the pure complexion, the perfect outlines, assure me of that. Intellectually, even my ideal—mine, the hypercritical, the dreamer. For the scope of her thoughts, their direction and combination, even in little things, were such as those in which I had specially and most lovingly practised myself. Morally—how admirable to me—sickened with the lean righteousness of business honor, the undistinguishable righteousness of churches choking with worldly weed, the utter non-righteousness of politicians and editors inconceivably soulless, soaked and seasoned in foulest falsehood until their original flavor, not in itself the most delicate, had disappeared under the gross superimposition of “practical life,”—to me wearied and sickened with such, how bright and noble her unrestrained, flashing sarcasm, her steady, flaming anger, against little men ! Was it not even superfluously demonstrated that in reading, in study, in thought, word and work, we might

be true and helpful yokefellows? Desiring things noble and true, and working for them? And that she would be truly a help—not in the assumption to herself of daily drudgeries, and in details and the freeing me therefrom (for how pleasant to shoulder my proper moiety of such burdens!) but in thinking with parallel and coequal vigor, in the same field of thought; in writing, talking, studying, the same pursuit. What a limitless dream of true union and interfusion of spirits!

But, a prudent elder might object, I didn't know it; I was merely hypothetizing. That merely means that my methods of observing men and women, my rules for managing my inductions, my synthesis and analysis, are at fault. But as long as my experiments do not deceive me, I shall (*mei enim unius vel maxime interest*) rely upon them, in preference to the chilly vaticinations of an unfortunate senior, whose own faithlessness has wrought its

like, most probably, in those with whom he dealt, and so governed his opinion of them all. Moreover, I was arrogant or wild enough to believe, within my secret soul, that the instinctive delight, and the new and strange tumults antithetically stirred within me by this troublous Irene, this war-arousing Peace, were alone premises amply justificatory of my delicious conclusions. And it must and shall be so, if indeed she will embark with me—I would chant to her, despite the cold old man, as beseechingly as did the damsel to Thalaba the Destroyer :—

And pleasantly, through pleasant banks

“ The morn is young, the sun is fair ;

The quiet streams flow on—

Wilt thou embark with me ?

Thou knowest not the watery way—

Tho’ day is fair yet night must come—

Dar’st thou embark with me ?

Through fearful perils thou may’st pass—

Thou wilt embark with me ? ”

When I shall speak so to her, with the

loving assurance of the last words, assuming, and so in part, at least, shaping the desired reply, shall I not have it ?

I think, yes.

Such meditations must suffice for apology. I sought out a curious old volume which I had found at the book-stall—the only bibliographical treasure in my profession. For it was from this book that I desired to read a passage to Miss Chester—a quaint and musical chapter, hidden among the mystical musings of the nameless old German author. Nameless, for title-page and colophon were both gone, and my bibliographic lore did not suffice me to discover the writer.

What Miss Chester would say, or how she would receive the doctrine of the coverless old book, I doubted. However I went at the appointed time, and found her as per agreement. I talked a few minutes abstractedly and unconnectedly, upon indifferent matters ; but not, of

course, with any remarkable success. Then we spoke of Heinrich Zschokke, and his marvellous power of imagination; of his story of the Sleep-walker; and suddenly I remembered Miss Chester's former reference to Hortensia's recognition of the vile nature of the Italian nobleman, and further of her careful avoidance to tell me whether she had actually recognized such in myself. And also something suggested to me to contrive, now, to know fully what she could discover on that subject. Without pausing to reconsider, I spoke—

“Miss Chester do you remember saying that you were entirely sure of your ability to resist magnetic forces from other persons?”

“I am, at any rate; although I do not remember saying so. Why?”

“Because I desire leave of you to test the justice of a suspicion which you entertain of me.”

“I don't understand. Test it how?”

“In this way :” and I hurried on with my request, lest my courage should fail me, or lest any pause should admit a blank denial. “Let me dream of you as I did before, at the times when you felt it ; and permit the magnetic power to be intensified as far as you dare allow. But, meanwhile, look keenly ; and consider closely, whether in me you observe the abominable degradation which I see that you believe implied in the possession of the psychical authority. I would not ask too much of you, without a valid reason, either. I have the right, now, so far as I can use it, without risk to you, to relieve myself from a suspicion which I *know* is unfounded. I fell under it without intention or wish. Do me the justice to allow me the only practicable chance of defense ; in which, moreover, the evidence is to be submitted to the accuser, and the verdict to come from the same. I never asked to rebut a suspicion before. But I never dreamed

that I could fall under such a one, or that it could be entertained of me by one so pure as you."

She sat, blushing, with eyes cast down ; sighed ; looked at me as if about to speak ; hesitated ; looked away upon the floor ; at last, spoke.

"I wish you would not insist ; and, honestly, because I dread to have that which I only suppose, now, changed into a wretched certainty. But if you do insist, I think I ought to grant you the trial."

"I do, indeed," I answered. "For I *know* what I am."

"You must not ask me to look at you, however. That would originate a most unpleasant self-consciousness. I will read, and you may exercise your privilege without looking at my face."

She took up the old book I had brought, and opened it. I sat still, thinking of myself, and of her. I knew that my soul was as pure as her own. I would vindicate

before her my unsullied honor. It should appear to her that there might be another soul, not merely competent to consort with her own in light accomplishments, in intellectual labor, in social pleasure, but able, moreover, to ride as triumphantly as her own in the pure heaven of sunlighted and tranquil contemplations, far above the clouded, dark, dirty region where most thoughts are conversant—in such exercises and employments as are likest those of the Almighty Soul, or as we innately believe likest—in pure love, and in the wisdom accordant thereto. And my thoughts fled away, away ; and deeper and deeper, from within my soul arose the assertion of purity and honor unstained. And I added a meditation ; that the perfect being upon whom my contemplations were so intensely concentrated, should be my own ; that my hemisphere life should be rounded into full symmetry, by the conjunction therewith of the feminine thoughts and powers, which,

by virtue of my manhood, I could not have. Thus I meditated, dreamed ; without effort ; without wish ; for no such delightful trance had ever enwrapt me before. And so my conscious intellection quite departed ; and when I was recalled from my intuitional inner life—not now by a rude and angry shock, as if struck upon the face by one insulted, but awaked by a sudden strong and clear exertion of independent will!—and looked, in an overwhelming dread, which *would* lower upon me, in spite of my efforts, towards my companion, she sat with her face hidden between her two hands, turned from me, bowed down upon the arm of the sofa, in an agony of passionate weeping.

I could not speak—I dared not speak. I apprehended all fatal things. It never occurred to me to doubt the power of the psychical insight ; and that its clear light had shone upon some innermost debasement, of which I had been most profoundly

and innocently ignorant, I despairingly believed. And that was the worth of all my wisdom in self-measurement and self-estimation !

Miss Chester suddenly sat upright ; drove away her emotion, at least from outward manifestation ; hastily dried her tears ; threw back the hair which had fallen in heavy bands and curls over her face ; turned her eyes straight and steadily upon my own ; and said, blushing, but firmly, " I most fully believe you to be, and to have been, utterly pure and noble."

" Pure in truth ;" I answered. " Noble in aspiration, if not in accomplishment. And I would thank you, if thanks were due for justice done."

She made no answer—apparently lost in some recollection. Nor could I desire to speak ; for I exulted in silent joy at the recognition of the truth and honor which I had felt that I might fairly claim. The silence was prolonged almost to awkwardness,

when the open piano caught my eye, and I said—

“You promised me some music, Miss Chester. Will you please play?”

She arose, and crossing to the instrument, sat down. Then she asked—

“What music do you prefer?”

“Music? If you will play me such as you like, I will promise to like it.”

“That is too complimentary. I want the music to please you in itself.”

“I did not mean a compliment. But does it displease you that I feel certain that I should of myself, choose such music as you would, and therefore that I may trust you to choose it for me?”

She asked, without direct answer, and without looking at me—“Did you ever compose any music?”

“Only in one way. Sometimes beautiful words have made themselves a melody for me, while I have been thinking them over, and I have written it, and played or sung it.”

She made no reply, but played a nocturne. It was intricate and monotonous, I thought. But it was sad ; and threw me into mournful thought. And I distinguished something veiled within it, as it were ; a soul of hidden meaning, within the exterior sounds ; whose existence, however, was only suggested to me at the repeat of the last strain but one, and in the last strain. As the full chords, of the last cadence died into silence, I said, almost unconsciously—

“ I wish I might hear that again.”

She played it again. And that second rendering astonished me. The music was the same, yet not the same. I could distinguish the same ideas and strains which I had heard before. But the cadences and mournful singing of the quiet measures took on, now, a new and startling significance.

The composition was entirely new to me. As I said, it had, at first, been simply a quiet and monotonous performance, difficult of

execution; and not until near the end, as my ear began to interpret the singularly repetitious concatenations of the successive strains, did I catch a glimpse of *any* meaning; and even that had nearly escaped me. At the second hearing, however, I saw, if I may so speak, more clearly. The involved and almost superfluous instrumentation, the full and sustained harmonies seemed to have been thrown around, as shadowing veils and draperies, to hide the import of the thread of melody; or to conceal it from all but the closest observation. And thus it came to me; flashing or streaming up; or sounding faintly and dimly; struggling from underneath the enveloping weight of the great volumes of sound; scarcely seen; as one might gaze down into the dark ravine, through boiling mountain mists, and here and there catch a glimpse of men, dimly distinguished, passing upon an unknown errand. In such a way I gradually became aware of

the meaning of the singular combinations which were presented before me. But, now, moreover, I began to be conscious of a strange, and yet of an uncommonly clearly indicated significance in the music ; although it is perhaps a question liable to doubt, how much of this apparent tangibility of meaning is due to the general or contemporaneous condition or tendencies of my thoughts, and how much to the conceptions and executive success of the composer. But, at first faintly, as from an infinite distance, through darkness and clouds, sorrowful utterances were spoken ; wailings of some one alone, fearful, rising now and then into loud sobs and clamorous cries of misery. They grew more and more articulate ; in melancholy distinctness they now resounded clearly above the clinging enwrapments of the full accompaniment. So clear was the representation that, as the wailing strains cried out to me, my eyes involuntarily filled with

tears. But the lamentations and the lonely crying faded away. Then, muffled and dimly as before, came another strain—a lovely and sweet-flowing strain, singing first from afar and then from nearer, comfort and hope. The wailing cry recommenced, as if the unhappy one sought consolation from the singer; and the sorrow and the joy for a time were chanted together. But the sad subordination of the mourner was modulated, ere long, by a magical re-presentation of the same musical idea, but a sad one no longer, into a happy and harmonious sympathy with the loftier joy; and the whole drama was auspiciously concluded by the triumphant beauty of more unconcealed gladness which had first struck me in the latter part of the composition. It sang and rejoiced exceedingly; though still in the strangely restrained and hidden undercurrent in which the whole air was interpreted; in lovely and happy melody—the still, bright

happiness of perfect content.

The instrument was still. The lovely musician, too, sat motionless, but evidently in the keen excitement of an artist ; with eyes cast down and cheeks flushed ; even, I fancied, refraining from tears, only by strong effort.

Neither of us thought of more music. We returned to our former seats.

I entertained a curious hope about the music. "Miss Chester," said I, "did you compose that music?"

She answered ; with confusion, however, and evident hesitation. "Yes."

"Have you ever played it to others than me?"

"Yes. Two or three times."

"Did any one ever ask you to repeat it?"

"No."

"And was there a meaning in the music?"

She answered almost inaudibly, "Yes."

"I thought so," said I, "and I have

discovered it. It meant sorrow ; loneliness ; longing ; then satisfaction and joy. did it not ? ”

Of that I was quite sure. And I was, besides, so arrogant as to hope that she meant more than that ; that *that* was a nothing—dross—mere miserable husks—to the delicious confession—the sweetest of all revelations—which I hoped I had heard. For I dared not think that she had spoken her longings to me in the music, as to one haply able to supply the desire of her heart—to drive the sorrow and loneliness far away—that she had revealed her soul to me in that sweet and safe unspoken way, trusting that if I were indeed such an one as she desired, I should understand the hieroglyph—the sacred hidden speech. This was the tumultuously joyful hope that illuminated and disturbed my mind ; that unsteadied my hand ; that made me tremble ; that almost deprived me of the command of my voice. But still with an

ulterior design—for yet there was a possibility that I might by error be preparing an overwhelming disappointment—I had hidden all that part of my interpretation of the music for which I cared, and assumed, perhaps at the risk of appearing conceited, the completeness of the general translation which I gave in words.

With sudden coolness—more delightful to me than a satisfied tone could have been, for I interpreted it to mean disappointment at the shallow reading, and mortification at the gratuitous and uncomprehended expenditure of emotion, Miss Chester answered—

“You are right. But there was more ; which, however, I suppose you could not be expected to understand.”

“Perhaps not,” I answered, with as much indifference as I could command, seeing that her answer corroborated my suspicion. “But I am exceedingly obliged to you for the music ; and more, for displaying to me

what you do not grant to many—the result of your own thoughts, and the workings of your own soul.”

“Have I?” she asked with sudden bitterness.

“Yes; you have. But I was to read you a passage from an old book, bearing upon the psychological matters of which you and I have some experience. Shall I?”

“If you please,” she said coldly and with evident disinclination to listen.

“I will,” I replied. “And I had liefer read it now, than before the beautiful music, or before I came here this evening.”

Then I took the book, and read from *Cap. Tertium*, commencing with the second paragraph; rendering the old German into partly correspondent English, as follows:

“Now shall I show how there is included in the major or principal sympathy which worketh from Our Lord to his creatures, and returneth back from them to him—whether such creatures possess the life of

the stone only, or that and the life of the tree, or those and the life of the beast, or the life of the man, which is the synthesis of the three with the love and wisdom of Our Lord therein infused—the sympathy *in singulis*.

“For this sympathy, namely, the major, is such as that in it we all, who are human, are one; since only by virtue of intimate oneness could interchange and increase of life be permitted; therefore, we, our fathers, and those who shall follow us, are, except for the extenuation of Time, one and the same being.

“And sith it be so, we may now the readier comprehend the case of such who are drawn together by an unisonous nature, being, in course of accident, put each within the sphere and influence of the other. But first I would discuss the reasons why not all are so drawn in love to consonance of society and unity of thought and will. This is like that case of the unfriendly

rivers, whereof the pure, in horror of the other's turbid flow refused mingling ; and ran a far way to the sea, apart by itself, upon a line drawn between. For in such wise is it that pure minds are wont to withdraw, and not to have converse with the common, the maculated souls by sin, by folly and by worldliness ; so as that they do harbor all alone, and thereby do oft-times miss of meetings which might befall to them mingling in the crowds. And likewise, the imperfection which sin has seated so deeply in men doth cause imperfection of body and of mind, contrariously to the will of the imperfect ; and that imperfection meeting another imperfection, may not consent therewith, and consent and union may not be ; no more than oil may mingle with water, though both be of mean nature in themselves, because they be differently directed. And moreover, the perfectness of this union can by no means be, except between a man and a woman ; for they be

so by Our Lord made, alike yet differing, as that the strength and wisdom of the one, may counterbalance the weakness of the other, and the loving and intuitions of her may fill many offices which the man cannot do. For no one nature, less than Our Lord's is perfect. And the two things be most extreme in contradiction one of another ; and thus the quiet and loving woman and the strong and bold man ; do in their synthesis and unity arise into truth and perfection, such as our humanity may attain, before we arise into the heaven of Our Lord.

“ And thus it is that the noble Love of perfect union is rare ; since to it there go many conditions preliminary and needful ; and also many there be which I do not here enumerate ; treating them in full in another place ; and moreover, untrue torsions and perversions from the training and governance suffered in youth, do discourage and weaken the Inner Truth ; insomuch

that where such persons may perchance be cognizant each of the other, the woman saith nothing, since she believith, by her instructions had, that love and a perceived union should ever be quite concealed, and not by any means intimated to any ; and she doth no longer clearly see the light of that Truth which would advise to the speedy signification of the recognized wish. Nor doth the man speak, for he is by the false humility taught by his governors injured to hide his goodness in silence ; for poverty ; or for small learning ; or for some empty crust or ghost of accident ; inso-much that he repels and silences the Inner Truth which would fain speak to the woman.

“ But seldom therefore doth it fall out that such are revealed to one another by the speech of the inner voice ; and they be by that voice known one to another, having articulated naught ; and if only they be such, by fortune of their life and experience,

that they have lived in the freedom of the thoughtful ; and if haply they do speak, and their spoken minds do harmonize in that outer manifestation of the true life hidden beneath the three-folded veil of the body, the mind and the will, then sad and miserable is their after-lot if they shall then depart either from the other. For having let go the unity and beauty in living, which is the fortune of few, and which Our Lord thus presents readily at their hand, right is it that they should not forwardly prevail to have the precious jewels of Our Lord submitted as vile wares to the unsteady choice of their careless hesitation and tardy folly. And not twice within the small life of man is that to happen ; nor, truly, oftener than once in the lives of millions of men."

I laid the book away, in silence. I dared not look at Miss Chester. I had shot my bolt, but I dared not, for the moment question whether the mark was hit.

Yet the misery of the suspense forthwith arose over the hesitation ; I looked ; but she sat motionless, looking down. I could not bear to wait, or to leave anything longer indefinite.

“ Irene,” I said—

She started, but did not answer, nor look up.

“ Irene, the old man from whom I read, spoke for me ; and what he says is true. I desire to confess to you that I hid part of the truth, in interpreting the music to you, so that I might answer what I believe it said, in the same hidden way. But my interpretation was bolder and deeper than I said. If I understand the music, you will not be vexed that I am so free to call you Irene.”

She did not move nor speak. I dared not take her hand. It resisted not ; but as I touched her she trembled, and sighed.

“ Irene, if I understand the voice of the music, I may hold your hand in mine.

But will you not raise your eyes to mine?

She did. And the sad beauty of her deep eyes, for they swam in springing tears, and there were traces of tears upon her flushed cheeks, brought tears into my eyes. Sadly and steadily, but as if with intense effort she gazed.

“Irene—my Irene—if I understand the voice of the music, I may love you; and you will love me—and be my Irene—Peace—my life-long peace.”

Still she answered not; but her eyes overflowed now.

“You will not deny me, Irene, will you?” I drew her towards me and kissed her. She did not endeavor to prevent it. She returned the kiss.

And though she afterwards withdrew herself from within my arms, and gently insisted that I must go, for that time, offering me a farewell kiss, of her own accord; and though we have been often out of each other's sight, my Irene—my beloved wife—and I have never been parted since.

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